



Navalny's death: Views from Russian media

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Reactions from Russian politicians, commentators, and social media

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Alexei Navalny (1976 – 2024)

What are Russians saying about the death of Alexei Navalny? Let's have a look.

Reactions from politicians

Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said Brussels and Washington are to blame for Navalny's death. He added that Navalny's death benefits countries that are pushing for more sanctions against Moscow.

LDPR leader Leonid Slutsky said that the death of one person was a disaster but he was more concerned about the conflict in Ukraine. He vowed that Russia would not allow Navalny's death to be "used in the interests of the West".

State Duma Deputy Sergei Mironov, the leader of A Just Russia — For Truth, said Navalny's death "benefits Russia's enemies. It is necessary to investigate the circumstances of the death and take measures to repel the information attack of the West." He concluded that the West was to blame for the death, which came as Moscow was calling for negotiations with Washington.

Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Commission to Investigate Interference of Foreign States in the Internal Affairs of Russia, Mikhail Delyagin, said that Western countries will likely use Navalny's death as a to introduce new sanctions. He also predicted that the death could be used as a pretext to seize Russian assets that were frozen at the beginning of the SMO.

Vladimir Dzhubarov, Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council Committee on International Affairs, described Navalny's death as an "accident" and insisted that the Russian government had no motive to harm Navalny while he was in prison.

Reactions from Telegram channels and commentators

Russian Telegram channels were quick to point out that Yulia Navalnaya made a surprise appearance at the Munich Security Conference, where she spoke about her husband's death, announced just hours prior.

"You can believe in a coincidence, but a series of coincidences that benefit one side is very difficult [to believe]," wrote Roman Alekhin, a military volunteer who curates a popular Telegram channel.

Tot samyy olen, another popular Telegram channel, expressed similar suspicions:

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Obviously, the death of the extremist oppositionist Navalny happened at the right time—exactly after the interview with Tucker Carlson, in the midst of the presidential campaign in Russia and during the Munich Security Conference, which very conveniently brought together all the main actors of this anti-Russian play, including Navalny's wife. All of them almost instantly made accusatory speeches at press conferences specially convened for this purpose. [...]

All the circumstances of the mysterious death have yet to be clarified, but we believe that even after the examination no one will publicly answer all the questions. One of the reasons for the transfer of chief prisoner Navalny from institution to institution according to a secret protocol was precisely due to fears for his life. Navalny was the most guarded prisoner in Russia, who was watched 24 hours a day ... We believe that some [Russian officials] are clearly at risk of losing their shoulder straps.

Political commentator Anatoly Nesmiyan argued that Navalny's decision to return to Russia, where he faced certain imprisonment, suggested that he was being groomed for a "Mandela project". Navalny's death raises questions about who inside Russia "guaranteed" Navalny's safety and why this "project" was ultimately derailed, Nesmiyan wrote.

RT editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan wrote on Telegram that numerous "victims" of Navalny's "custom-made investigations" had contacted her and gloated over Navalny's death (they used an expression, "Земля стекловатой", that basically translates to "I hope he *doesn't* rest in peace"). Simonyan said she wanted to make similar statements but wanted to show self-control during Lent.

Sergei Karnaukhov, a former government official who runs a popular Telegram channel and makes regular appearances as a political analyst on state television, said that Navalny's death was an attempt by the West to destabilize Russia:

Before the elections and presidential inauguration, the West will try to launch a powerful and multifactorial attack on our country. All this will be paid for, coordinated and filled by Western intelligence services, as well as supplemented by the work of Ukrainian special services and sabotage and subversive structures. The task that Western intelligence services will try to solve is to disrupt the presidential elections in the Russian Federation. At the same time, they understand well that nothing will work out. In this regard, all emphasis will be transferred to the post-election period. The voting results will not be recognized, the elected head of state will be declared an illegitimate "outlaw", increasing the isolation of Russia.

And lastly, who could have committed this crime, and most importantly, how? We will certainly return to this question.

Military-political blogger Yuriy Podolyaka described Navalny's death as "inevitable":

After all, it was obvious that Navalny's sponsors, realizing that there was zero benefit from him alive, and a huge benefit from him dead ... would once again try to finish him off. Moreover, when it would be of most benefit. Now is just such a moment.

Liberal news portal "We Can Explain" compiled a list of reactions from Kremlin critics.

"This is a shocking event that will be difficult for the authorities to use favorably. It is likely that they will try not to ignore it. But the feeling of an electoral 'holiday' will still be reduced," political scientist Mikhail Vinogradov told the outlet. "It's too early to judge by the reaction of society ... So far, the main intrigues are more likely related to the world reaction to what happened, since Navalny was often perceived as politician No. 2 [in Russia]."

Other commentators cited by the channel implicated the Kremlin in Navalny's "murder".

Liberal anti-Kremlin outlet The Bell also blamed the Russian government for Navalny's death, claiming that it was "absurd" to suggest that the West orchestrated the death of Russia's most high-profile prisoner:

The reaction of Russian propaganda and second-line officials boils down to two theses: the West is to blame for Navalny's death, and the Kremlin did not benefit from his murder. The first thesis, suggesting that the West was able to reach the most guarded Russian prisoner in one of the most distant colonies, is too absurd to talk about. The second thesis follows tradition: the Kremlin's non-involvement in the murder of Boris Nemtsov was explained in exactly the same way in 2015. But it will be very difficult to argue this thesis in the case of Alexei Navalny. [...]

The domestic political risks associated with Navalny's murder are also small. Director of the Levada Center (foreign agent) Denis Volkov, in a conversation with The Bell today, confidently said that one should not expect serious protests in Russia now: protesting is dangerous, useless, and Navalny's popularity has declined since 2021. "By the beginning of 2023, he had already dropped out of the top ten most trusted politicians. After this, Navalny's rating fluctuated in an open question at 1%. The lowest figure is January 2024," Volkov said.

But the inevitable decline in interest in Navalny after he was imprisoned did not mean that he ceased to be a long-term threat in the eyes of the Kremlin. "When the situation itself turned towards greater authoritarianism, people's faith in any changes dried up, the sociological effect that Denis Volkov talks about takes place. But it could just as easily change in the opposite direction. In the long term, Navalny remained a strong and popular politician with large accumulated political capital. In this way, he certainly posed a threat to Putin," says Re:Russia project director Kirill Rogov.

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Russia's anti-vax community noted (somewhat jokingly) that reports of Navalny dying from a blood-clot should raise eyebrows.

Reactions on internet forums

A thread about Navalny's death on popular Russian discussion forum Yaplakal currently has 180 pages of comments. Although forum users expressed a wide range of views, the most-upvoted comments highlighted the curious timing of Navalny's death, and how it would hurt, rather than benefit, the Kremlin.



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